

Standing Judo

The Combination and Counter Attacks

by Mikonosuke Kawaishi

The combination will lack purity ... the counter will not be Judo. This rather oversimplified idea, once widespread, corresponds perhaps to our need for the Absolute, to a nostalgia for Perfect Movement which we must always search for and which comes so rarely.

Mikonosuke Kawaishi

Indeed, Judo is practically without limit, as varied as life itself. The movement which succeeds, however, is not isolated in its perfection from what has gone before, but is always the more or less conscious exploitation of an opportunity, happy coincidence or prepared in advance.

This exploitation, this instantaneous adaptation to opportunities, this momentary action which could not be other than it is without losing its efficacy, perfection and beauty, is always the result of very persevering training; this does not mean to say that it should be disordered or thoughtless.

Whatever the aptitude of the Judoka may be, he must always practise, because as in life, facility may be in the beginning a springboard but very quickly becomes a handicap; and, paradoxically, one can say that in the end, a gifted individual needs more character to perfect himself to a higher grade than one less endowed.

For this reason, in Judo as in life, one very often sees that the ones who succeed have more than facility: tenacity.

'There is no miracle but which is merited'.

In matters of training, a controversy divides the supporters of hard, physical effort, and those of a more intellectual approach: the 'sweaters' and the 'visionaries'. It is quite evident that if you isolate the 'line' of a throw in your thoughts, if KO-UCHI-GARI really becomes for you the dive, level with the ground, that it should be; if O-UCHI-GARI becomes the lateral flight which, again, it should be, you fix your mind on the heart of the movement in a way that will enable you to progress in the right direction - when, and if you practise.

'Imagination is more important than knowledge'.

But it is also quite evident that if you practise in a haphazard manner without selecting the movements, without analysing from time to time the reasons for your checks as well as your progress, you could tire yourself very much and for a long time without making any improvement.

These two extremes, therefore, are to be rejected equally - or almost equally - for experience has taught me that occasionally the body is more intelligent than the head, and that the disordered repetition finishes by disciplining itself, the movement badly done ends by correcting itself. The action which succeeds is made up of all those which have missed their mark.

But let us return after these considerations to the discipline of training, to the Tokui-waza (one's favourite technique), to combinations and counters.

The 'Tokui-waza' is a sort of magic formula which permits you to penetrate your opponent's defence. The combination, the counter, these really form the dialogue of Judo; the question, the reply and the pleading, thanks to which one can end by convincing and thereby beating one's opponent.

I have said and written on many occasions that the Tokui-waza is to some extent a gift made to you by the good spirit of Judo to enable you to progress. It is after the Tokui-waza stage that you can develop a personal style of Judo and bring into harmony all your possibilities, often unconscious and unrecognized in the beginning, and all the chances, opportunities and means of expression which Judo offers you.

Several short definitions: the combination is the process of attack which enables you to follow up a technique blocked or evaded by your opponent, with another and more effective one which exploits his blocking or evasive action. Theoretically, the possibilities for combination techniques are extremely numerous. They are not, however, unlimited; in practise it is quite rare to see more than three or four successive combinations used to score a point.

But immediately one notices another possible way of using combinations - the feint. The first attack is just a trap to provoke your opponent's reaction. It should, of course, be made with sufficient force and conviction to fix his attention and make his body react in the desired way.

There is, finally, the ultimate possibility - that of 'confusion'. The attacker comes in from all angles in such a way that his opponent's defence is over-run and stifled, he keeps the initiative and makes his decisive

attack when the appropriate opportunity presents itself.

Let us note at once that small and light Judoka must work very hard at their combination techniques as their attacks and their ability to change position are a little more rapid; consequently, combinations can counter-balance disadvantages of size and weight in competition.

Regarding this, and as the opportunity is given to me, I specify that following the example of my masters, elders and equals, without exception, I consider the controversy over weight classifications as being without any serious foundation. Jigoro Kano regarded the problem as not worth thinking about; he had as soon as possible accepted and encouraged competition, because for him a true sport was primarily a school for life long before being a pretext for champions. And further, because competition is above all a reason to conquer one's self much more than to beat an opponent. Finally, because however much people should go in for competition (whether or not a title is at stake, in public or in private; the essential thing is that the competition should be genuine), the period of the champion is over in about ten years, but that of the master (as we know from examples and from the past) should last one's entire life. In combination techniques, therefore, keep the initiative, anticipate your opponent's attack and kill his competitive spirit and his own initiative.

Technically, the combination can be:

- an attack repeated in rapid succession.
- a modified attack; that is to say, the relative contact between the two contestants is modified. One starts with TAI-OTOSHI, for example, and transforms it into KUBI-NAGE.
- lastly, it could be a combination on the ground following an imperfect throw and which has not resulted in 'waza ari'.

The counter is the exploitation of your opponent's attacking technique to your own advantage. Let us distinguish the various counters that are possible:

- You can counter, purely and simply, by making use of the point in your opponent's attack when his balance is weak. Example: UCHI-MATA against KO-SOTO-GAKE, or TOMOE-NAGE against KO-UCHI-GARI.
- You can use the 'dead spot' at the commencement of his attack. Example: O-UCHI-GARI against TOMOE-NAGE.
- You can equally well use the 'dead spot' at the end of his attack. For example, by countering HANE-GOSHI with HIZA-GURUMA.
- You can counter from your own block: you have controlled his attack, you then block and counter. This applies in the case of sutemi throws used when your opponent's balance has been weakened to the rear following hip or shoulder attacks.
- You can counter by using your opponent's own momentum; for example, by countering shoulder throws with YOKO-SUTEMI-WAZA, or better still, by countering UCHI-MATA with TAI-OTOSHI or UKI-OTOSHI
- Finally, you can make a direct counter-attack. For example, your opponent attacks with O-UCHI-GARI and you counter with DE-ASHI-BARAI or OKURI-ASHI-BARAI.
- As a final possibility, the transition from standing techniques to groundwork: as your opponent attacks you take him to the ground.

One can sum up this analysis by saying that there are two important principles in countering:

- You can make use of your opponent's positive attack;
- or you forestall the attack before it actually begins.

Consequently (at the risk of repeating myself) the difference between combinations and counters is simple:

- in combinations TORI holds the initiative in attack, which he adapts according to UKE's reactions of resistance, until the moment when the rhythm of his attack has over-run and smothered his opponent's rhythm of defence.
- The principle of countering is, on the contrary, to use the appropriate technique when your opponent's balance has been weakened following an attack which you have blocked or surmounted.

Finally, there exist two different conceptions of counter-attacking - that of the counter, and that which in fencing is called the 'remise':

- GONOSEN: the most common and the first to be practised, consists in frustrating the attack against you and then taking advantage of your opponent's resulting loss of balance.
- URA-WAZA: this consists of anticipating your opponent's attack, in thinking more quickly than he does; this technique reflects most faithfully the true spirit of Judo; but here again, it is necessary to have progressed beyond the beginner's stage.

The study and practice of combinations and counters constitute a strong reason for significant progress in Judo. To resume my literary comparison of an earlier page, it is the study of syntax, then dissertation, following the basic knowledge of vocabulary.

This study improves your movement, your 'tai-sabaki' and your balance. But the disadvantage of this practice, if undertaken too soon and too systematically, might be that the Judoka would make his attacks less genuine and determined, which must remain the basic principle. Furthermore, in his progression up the ladder which constitutes the Judo life of a student, one generally sees this tendency manifest itself for the first time towards the second year of practice; the young Blue or Brown belt is, it seems, paralysed for a time by the vague picture of what he might be able to do - and faced by this abyss- does nothing.

It is again at this point that the Instructor must intervene and, avoiding empty explanations, bring the student back to fundamental movements studied frankly and thoroughly.

The spirit of competition consists of attack, of anticipating the attacks of your opponent and imposing your own upon him. In this sense, the idea of systematic countering is not a source of progress. Countering should not be limited to ambushing, or lying in wait. There also, experience shows us that the Judoka who restricts himself to this attitude does not win for very long in competition, and above all makes no more progress because he is relying on his partner.

But, nevertheless, for the Judoka who preserves his fighting spirit, his spirit of offence and his combative instinct, there is another advancement which is the following: The old experts say that for combinations, the 'eye' is sufficient. For counters, one needs perception, contact; and the instinct which allows you to anticipate your opponent's intentions comes gradually, and only with considerable practice in competitive randori. The exposition that I am going to give of combination techniques and counters is deliberately as brief as possible.

It is assumed that you know all the basic movements.

Consequently, I shall dwell only on the characteristic details - such as the transition from one attack to another, the block, evasion or counter.

But I ask you to remember always this condition for progress: study first of all your combination techniques and counters, slowly and carefully, analysing them in every detail.

One does not go far - anywhere - without an ideal, without enthusiasm or perseverance. You must be worthy, excel yourself always - just as in Judo, it is necessary for one's movement to excel in order to succeed.

Study your movements honestly without looking for the result, but rather the manner in which it is performed.

Argue neither with others nor with yourself: 'To divide ourselves on the methods, is to run the risk of failing to recognize that we are pressing forward towards the same goal'.

And the admirable point is, that among this desirable diversity of tendencies, styles and ideals, each preserves his personality - and Judo its unity.

Everything finishes by becoming simple, easy - after surmounting the difficult and complicated. The task of a lifetime!

[Note: This text is the preface to Standing Judo. For more excerpts from this book please see Counters and Combinations.]

When there is opposition, harmonize with it on the spot. *Ki-ichi-Hogen*

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